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## Video Game Takes Kids Outside

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is launching a new online video game aimed to encourage kids to go outside and learn about the environment. Designed for children ages 8 to 11 years old, Neighborhood Explorers is accessed through the Service's Let's Go Outside! website at <http://www.fws.gov/letsgooutside/>.

The journey through the game begins when you meet three children – Mia, Lucy and Steve – who gather in a tree house as the school year begins and talk about all the fun outdoor environmental activities they did over the summer. They form a Neighborhood Explorers Club, called the NX Club, and share information about planting gardens with native plants, backyard bird watching and urban wildlife. By exploring the tree house with your cursor, you can learn about endangered species, conservation heroes and threats to our natural world. Then you can play a fun jeopardy-style trivia game that tests your newly acquired environmental information in an entertaining and interactive venue.

Other activities include recording nature sightings in your own back yard, a race against time to find a missing praying mantis in the midst of an urban neighborhood, and identifying birds in a variety of habitats. When you finish a game, you can receive a gold, silver, or bronze patch, depending on how many points you score. Every game is a fun challenge as well as a valuable educational experience. You can also receive patches for documenting environmental projects and local wildlife, thus reinforcing the connection between the virtual and natural worlds.

When you've earned all five patches, you can receive a free tree from the Arbor Day Foundation! (A free membership to the NX Club is required so a record of your earned patches can be saved). After earning all five patches, you will be directed to the Arbor Day Foundation web site, where you can provide your name and address to get a free tree with directions for planting. There are only 450 trees available, so you should get started winning your patches right away!

Neighborhood Explorers provides an excellent educational opportunity for children and parents. By participating in this game, kids learn about nature and are encouraged to spend more time outside. Steve's summer activity, for example, is simply exploring and

observing nature. Children can also learn about problems that the environment is facing, such as pollution and invasive species, and discover ways to help solve these problems.

Unstructured play and discovery outside is an important part of childhood, and Neighborhood Explorers reinforces this through a medium that kids are familiar with: a video game. This is a great opportunity to show kids how caring about conservation and the environment can make a real-life difference in the world.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit **[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)**.

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